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UNCLAS KATHMANDU 001215

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NEPAL: BHUTANESE REFUGEE CAMPS FACE VIRAL INFLUENZA

1. As has happened in past years during the early to mid-monsoon period in Nepal, the Bhutanese refugee camps are facing widespread cases of viral influenza. According to UNHCR, the western refugee camps (Beldangi 1-3 and Sanischare) are suffering the peak of the disease, whereas the numbers of cases in Timai (northwest-most camp) are declining, and Kundunabari and Goldhap appear unaffected. (NOTE: This strain of viral influenza lasts from seven to 10 days, and manifests as a fever and chest cold. END NOTE.)

2. UNHCR, based on reports from its medical implementing partner AMDA (Association of Medical Doctors of Asia- Nepal) and UNHCR staff in the camps, indicated that, contrary to media reports (which reported 10 influenza-related deaths), only two recent illness-related deaths have occurred in the camps, and neither appears to be influenza-related. Instead, one appears to have been caused by a chest infection of unknown type, and the other a similar chest infection compounded by tuberculosis. In the latter case, the patient died while undergoing treatment at an AMDA hospital.

3. UNHCR reports no shortage of medicine in the camps. Moreover, on or about July 1, AMDA plans to bring a team of medical researchers to the camps to investigate and type the influenza strain.

4. COMMENT: Change in climate brought about by monsoon rains typically signals the advent of various diseases such as influenza, cholera, cyclospora and dysentery in Nepal. Thus, it is not surprising that the refugee camps, facing similar changes in temperature and humidity, with the additional difficulty of high-density hut-living, would experience at least the same incidence of disease as the rest of the country. It appears, however, that UNHCR and its medical implementing partner have the situation under control. END COMMENT.